

**Remarks
Ambassador Jim Zumwalt**

**Opening Remarks, African American Month
West Africa Research Center, Dakar
February 27, 2015**

(As prepared)

Monsieur le Directeur du WARC,
Chers invités,
Chers étudiants,

It is a real pleasure to be with you today here at the West Africa Research Center. We appreciate the major role that WARC has played in advancing the U.S.-Senegalese relationship through research and scholarly conferences. The Center -- and Director Ousmane Sène -- are our very close partners. Thank you, Director Sène, both for hosting me in my first visit to WARC and for hosting this wonderful event marking African American History Month.

In America, it has been only recently that we began to recognize the important contributions of African Americans in American history. One pioneer in this shift was Carter Woodson, a Harvard-trained historian, who 100 years ago created the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History to recognize the achievements of Americans of African descent. In 1926, Woodson and his colleagues organized the first Negro History Week. He laid the groundwork for the establishment of Black History Month in 1976, recognized each February by Presidential proclamation.

As a diplomat, I have dedicated much of my life to helping foreigners better understand my country. Each year, my colleagues and I in Embassies around the world have arranged events during February to recognize African Americans' achievements and contributions to the United States. We honor their role in making America better and stronger today but we also acknowledge the hardships they have faced. From the brutality of the slave trade to years of battling discrimination across the United States, African-Americans have persevered to claim their rights as Americans. The tragic deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner in New York show that this struggle is not over.

Speaking to the American people in December about the Ferguson case, President Obama said "We have made enormous progress in race relations over the course of the past several decades. I've witnessed that in my own life. And to deny that progress I think is to deny America's capacity for change." While we have come far as a nation, we still have a ways to go to meet the ideal enshrined in our Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal."

Today, you will have a chance to hear from a former U.S. diplomat, who after serving his country for many years, has turned to teaching, writing and speaking drawn from his many years as a Peace Corps volunteer, diplomat and educator. A graduate of, Cornell University, Sheldon Austin has a master's degree from the School for International Training in the U.S. and a

“maitrise” from Universite de Paris VII. With that experience, he is uniquely qualified to teach courses on intercultural communications and marketing at two universities in Paris, where he lives. Today, Mr. Austin will speak to you on grassroots organization in the political process with a focus on the Obama campaign’s ability to tap into local communities including African American communities. I look forward to joining you all for a discussion afterwards and for some light refreshments I hope to meet and talk with you more informally.

With that, please allow me to introduce today’s guest speaker, Sheldon Austin.